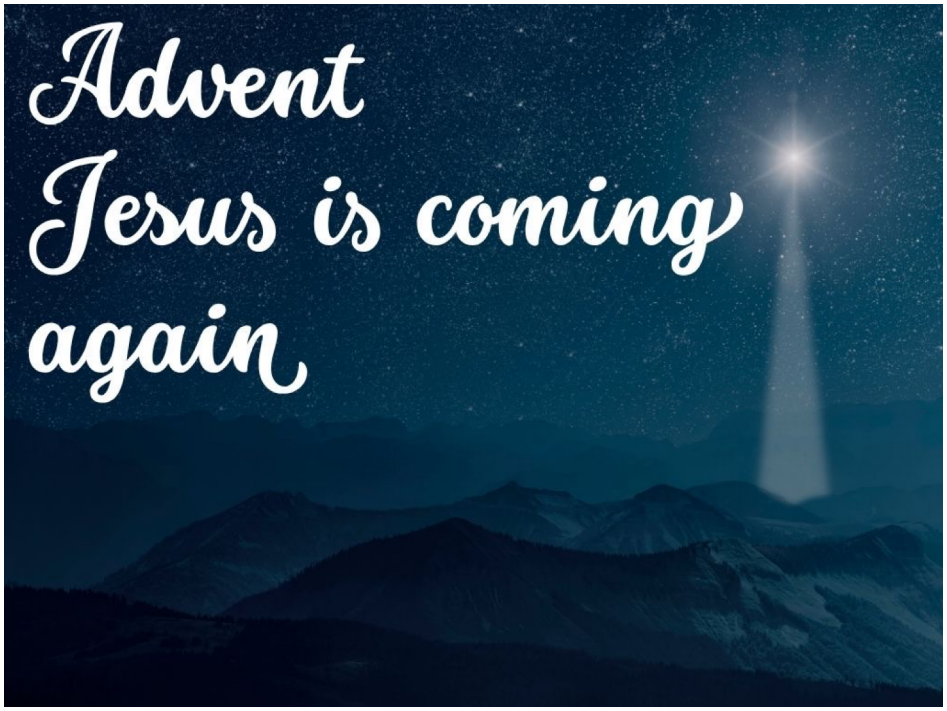


Advent 2026: Life Group Notes

This three-session Advent series focuses on the second coming of Jesus, exploring what it means to live faithfully in the light of his promised return. Rather than treating the subject simply as a matter of prophecy, dates or speculation, the sessions aim to help us to reflect on how the promise of Jesus' return shapes the way we live today.

Each of the sessions has plenty of material for discussion. Please don't feel like you need to work your way through all of it. Pick and choose what will work well for your group. Rather than asking every question in the discussion section, make sure you have time to cover the **Putting it into practice** section.

Session 1 – Are You Watchful?

Matthew 24:36-51

Living faithfully and attentively while we wait for Jesus.

Session 2 – Are You Ready?

Matthew 25:1-13

Preparing spiritually for the coming of the Bridegroom.

Session 3 – Are You Expectant?

1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11

Living with hope, encouragement and confidence in the return of Christ.

Session 1 – Are You Watchful?

Reading: Matthew 24:36-51

Theme: Faithfulness in the meantime

Main idea: Because we do not know when Jesus will return, we are called to live faithfully, attentively and responsibly every day.

Aim: To help the group understand what biblical watchfulness looks like, and to challenge us to live in a way that honours Jesus whether his return is soon or seemingly far away.

Introduction

Ask: Have you ever waited for something important, but not known exactly when it would happen?

This might include things like exam results, waiting for a visitor to arrive, a phone call, test results, a hospital appointment, a driving test or some other significant event.

Follow-up questions:

- How did that uncertainty affect the way you lived while you waited?
- Were you able to carry on with normal life, or did the waiting dominate everything?

Advent is a season of waiting. We remember that Jesus came into the world at the first Christmas, but we also look forward to the day when he will come again. The question is not simply *when* Jesus will return, but *how should we live while we wait?*

Read the Passage

Read Matthew 24:36-51.

Ask the group to listen for anything Jesus says about:

- What we don't know.
- What we should be doing.
- The attitudes or behaviours he warns against.

Context

Matthew 24 is part of a longer teaching by Jesus about the future, the destruction of the temple, difficult times and his return. His disciples are naturally curious about what is going to happen and when.

Jesus makes a striking statement in verse 36: **no one knows the day or hour.**

He then uses two illustrations:

- The days of Noah – people carried on with ordinary life without recognising what was coming.
- A householder and a thief – the householder would have acted differently had he known when the thief was coming.

Jesus then moves from the illustration to a direct challenge. What does it mean to be a faithful and wise servant?

The emphasis is not on calculating the timing of Jesus' return, but on being faithful in the responsibilities entrusted to us.

Discussion

Feel free to pick and choose if you don't have time to discuss all of these questions

Living without knowing the date

1. Why might people be tempted to try to predict or calculate when Jesus will come back?
2. What dangers might there be in becoming overly focused on *when* Jesus will return rather than *how* we should live?
3. In verses 37–39, Jesus compares his coming to the days of Noah. What do you think was the problem with the people in Noah's day? Was it necessarily that they were doing obviously wicked things, or could it be that they were simply living without any awareness of God?

What does it mean to be watchful?

4. Jesus says in verse 42, "Therefore keep watch." What do you think it means to be watchful as a Christian?
5. How can we remain spiritually alert while still living ordinary lives – going to work, raising families, caring for others, enjoying life and planning for the future?

The faithful and wise servant

6. In verses 45–47, the faithful servant is found doing what he has been entrusted to do. What might this look like for us today?
7. Jesus contrasts the faithful servant with the servant who becomes complacent and mistreats others. What might spiritual complacency look like in a Christian's life today?
8. How might the knowledge that Jesus could return change the way we treat people, especially those who are vulnerable, difficult or dependent upon us?
9. If Jesus returned today, what would you hope he would find you doing?

Putting it into practice

Read verse 46 again:

"It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns."

Invite each person to reflect quietly before sharing (if they'd like to).

Personal reflection

- Is there an area of my life where I have become spiritually complacent?
- Is there something God has entrusted to me that I am neglecting?
- Am I living with an awareness of Jesus, or have I become so absorbed in everyday life that I rarely think about him?

Practical challenge

Encourage each person to choose **one act of faithfulness** this week.

It could be:

- Re-establishing a daily time of prayer or Bible reading.
- Making time for someone who needs encouragement.
- Serving someone without expecting recognition.
- Taking a step towards reconciliation.
- Sharing the good news of Jesus with someone.
- Being more intentional about serving in church.
- Using a gift God has given them that they have neglected.

The point is not to become anxious about the second coming, but to live faithfully today.

Closing prayer

Pray together for the challenge that you've chosen to take on. You could use the following prayer to end.

Lord Jesus,
thank you that you have promised to come again.
Forgive us when we become distracted, complacent or absorbed in the things of this world.
Help us to remain watchful, not in fear, but in faith.
Teach us to be faithful in the things you have entrusted to us,
to love those around us,
and to serve you wholeheartedly while we wait for your return.
May you find us living for you when you come again.
Amen

Session 2 – Are You Ready?

Reading: Matthew 25:1-13

Theme: Preparedness that cannot be borrowed

Main idea: We cannot rely on someone else's faith or preparation. We need to be personally ready to meet Jesus.

Aim: To explore Jesus' parable of the ten virgins and reflect on what it means to have a genuine, enduring faith that is prepared for his return.

Introduction

Ask: What are the things in life you would never want to be unprepared for?

This might include things like going on holiday (don't forget your passport!), an exam, a wedding, emergency situations, a meeting or presentation.

Follow up questions:

- What do you normally do to make sure you are prepared?
- Is preparation always about having the right things with you, or is it also about developing the right attitude beforehand?

Jesus tells a story about ten young women waiting for a wedding celebration. All ten expect the bridegroom to arrive, but only five are prepared for the delay. Jesus uses the story to challenge us: **Are we genuinely ready for his return?**

Read the Passage

Read Matthew 25:1-13

Ask the group to listen for:

- What all ten women have in common.
- What distinguishes the wise from the foolish.
- What happens when the bridegroom arrives.

Context

This parable follows Jesus' teaching about his return in Matthew 24. The setting is a wedding celebration, where the bridegroom arrives unexpectedly after a delay.

All ten women are waiting. All have lamps. All expect the bridegroom. All become sleepy and fall asleep.

But only five have brought additional oil.

When the bridegroom finally arrives, the foolish women discover that they are not prepared. Their attempt to borrow oil from the others is unsuccessful, and they miss the celebration.

Jesus concludes with the command:

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

The parable is not primarily about predicting the time of Jesus' return. It is about the importance of being prepared for it.

Discussion

Feel free to pick and choose if you don't have time to discuss all of these questions

The similarities and differences

1. What similarities do you notice between the wise and foolish women? Why do you think Jesus emphasises that all ten were waiting?
2. What was the difference between the wise and foolish women? Was it obvious before the bridegroom arrived?
3. Why do you think the bridegroom was delayed? What might Jesus be teaching us about the time between his first and second coming?
4. The foolish women had lamps, but not enough oil. What might this suggest about the difference between outward appearances of faith and genuine spiritual readiness?

The meaning of readiness

5. What do you think the oil represents? How might we understand this without trying to assign a precise meaning to every detail of the parable?
6. What does it mean to have a faith that is prepared to endure a long wait?
7. Is it possible to begin our Christian journey with enthusiasm but become unprepared over time? What might cause that to happen?
8. What are some things that can gradually drain our spiritual lives? For example, busyness, disappointment, unanswered prayer, distraction, sin, anxiety or loss of community.
9. The foolish women ask the wise women to share their oil. Why can't the wise women simply give them what they need?
10. What does this teach us about the personal nature of faith? Can we rely on the faith of our parents, spouse, friends, church or Christian leaders to make us ready for Jesus?

The urgency of the invitation

11. In verse 10, the prepared women enter the wedding banquet, and the door is shut. What do you think Jesus wants his listeners to understand from this?
12. Does this passage challenge us more about our relationship with Jesus, our priorities, or the way we live? Why?
13. How can we help other people prepare to meet Jesus without becoming judgemental, fearful or self-righteous?
14. What would it look like for our church to be a community that is genuinely expectant of Jesus' return?

Putting it into practice

Read verse 13:

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Readiness is not about having a perfect Christian life, nor about never struggling with doubt. It is about living in a genuine relationship with Jesus, trusting him and allowing that relationship to shape our lives.

Personal reflection

- Is my faith something I personally own, or am I relying on the faith of others?
- What helps keep my relationship with Jesus alive?
- What has been draining my spiritual life recently?
- If Jesus returned tomorrow, is there anything I would wish I had taken more seriously?

Practical challenge

Invite everyone to choose **one way of replenishing their spiritual life** during Advent.

For example:

- Read one chapter of a Gospel each day.
- Spend ten minutes each day in prayer and stillness.
- Reconnect with someone who encourages your faith.
- Make Advent a season of intentional generosity.

Encourage people to choose something sustainable, rather than making an unrealistic commitment. We're all different – what one person finds replenishing might not work for others.

Closing prayer

Pray together for the challenge that you've chosen to take on. You could use the following prayer to end.

Heavenly Father,
thank you for the gift of Jesus and for the promise that he will come again.
Help us not to rely on the faith of others,
but to know you personally and deeply.
When we grow tired, distracted or discouraged,
renew our faith and fill us with your Holy Spirit.
Help us to live prepared,
with hearts full of love for Jesus
and lives shaped by his grace.
May we be ready to welcome him whenever he comes.
Amen.

Session 3 – Are You Expectant?

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Theme: Hope that shapes how we live

Main idea: The return of Jesus gives us hope in the face of death, confidence in the future and motivation to encourage one another and live faithfully today.

Aim: To understand the Christian hope of Jesus' return, how it speaks into grief and uncertainty, and how that hope should shape our daily lives.

Introduction

Ask: When you think about the future, what emotions do you most often experience?

This might include excitement, hope, anxiety, uncertainty, fear, curiosity. Try not to 'solve problems' in this section, just listen to what people have to say.

Follow up questions:

- What things in the future do you look forward to?
- What things about the future do you find difficult or worrying?

The Christian faith is not simply about looking back to what Jesus did at the first Christmas, or looking back to the cross and resurrection. It is also about looking forward. We believe that Jesus will return, that death will not have the final word, and that God's purposes will ultimately be fulfilled.

Paul writes to a church that is concerned about what will happen to Christians who have died before Jesus returns. His response is not a complicated explanation of the timetable of the end, but a message of hope.

Read the Passage

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Ask the group to listen for words or phrases that speak of:

- Hope
- Encouragement
- The future
- How Christians should live now

Context

Paul is writing to Christians who are concerned about those who have died. They appear to be worried that those believers might somehow miss out when Jesus returns.

Paul reassures them that those who have died in Christ are not forgotten or disadvantaged. The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of their hope.

He then moves into a discussion about the timing of Jesus' return. Like a thief in the night, it will come unexpectedly. But Christians are not to live in darkness or fear. They belong to the day, and should live with faith, love and hope.

The passage ends with a beautiful instruction:

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

The second coming is therefore not simply a doctrine to understand. It is a truth that should bring comfort, encouragement, hope and transformation to the Christian community.

Discussion

Feel free to pick and choose if you don't have time to discuss all of these questions

Hope in the face of death (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)

1. In verse 13, Paul says he does not want the believers to grieve like those who have no hope. Does this mean Christians should not grieve when someone dies? What is the difference between Christian grief and grief without hope?
2. Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important to Paul's argument in verses 14–16?
3. In verse 17, Paul speaks about being "with the Lord forever". Why might this be the most important part of the passage, regardless of the details of how Jesus' return happens?

Living in the light (1 Thessalonians 5:1–8)

4. Paul says that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Why is the unexpected nature of Jesus' return important?
5. In verses 4–5, Paul says Christians are not in darkness, but belong to the light and the day. What do you think it means to live as "children of the light"?
6. Paul contrasts being spiritually awake and sober with being asleep or drunk. What might spiritual sleepiness look like in our culture today?
7. How might faith, love and hope help us to remain spiritually strong when the world around us seems uncertain, troubled or frightening?

Hope that encourages others (1 Thessalonians 5:9–11)

8. Verse 9 reminds us that God has not destined us for wrath but for salvation through Jesus Christ. How does this help us understand the character of God and the purpose of Jesus' coming?
9. Verse 10 speaks of living together with Christ, whether we are awake or asleep. How does this reinforce the assurance that our future is secure in Jesus?
10. Paul tells the church to encourage one another and build each other up. Why is Christian hope something we should share rather than keep to ourselves?
11. What might it look like to encourage someone who is grieving, anxious about the future or struggling with their faith using the hope of Jesus' return?

Putting it into practice

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11:

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

The promise of Jesus' return should not make us fearful or withdrawn. It should make us people of hope who live faithfully and encourage others.

Personal reflection

- Does the return of Jesus give me genuine hope, or is it something I rarely think about?
- How does this hope affect the way I face difficult circumstances?
- Am I living as someone who belongs to the light?
- Who in my life needs encouragement at the moment?
- How could I share the hope of Jesus with them?

Practical challenge

Encourage everyone to choose **one person to encourage this week.**

Examples include:

- Visiting someone who is lonely.
- Writing a card or sending a thoughtful message.
- Praying with someone who is grieving.
- Offering practical help to someone facing difficulties.
- Sharing a Bible verse that has encouraged you.
- Speaking about the hope you have in Jesus with someone who is anxious about the future.

You might also invite everyone to adopt a simple Advent prayer for the coming weeks:

"Lord Jesus, help me to live today in the light of your coming."

Closing prayer

Pray together for the challenge that you've chosen to take on. You could use the following prayer to end.

Lord Jesus,
thank you that you have conquered death and that you have promised to come again.
Thank you that our future is secure in you and that nothing can separate us from your love.
Help us to live as children of the light, with faith, love and hope.
Comfort those who grieve, strengthen those who are anxious, and help us to encourage one another.
As we wait for your coming, may our lives reflect your goodness, your grace and your love.
Amen.